

RETURN JOURNEY TO CEYLON

A Radio Travelogue in Verse

by Tambimuttu

PLAYERS

John: Pleasant reciting voice

Paul: Deep contrasting voice

Dick: Boy's voice

Mother, Fr. Thomas, Two Peasants, Guide, Taxi-Driver

(Ceylon chakili / coolée / drumming. Fade and hold)

Announcer: John is on a visit to the island of Ceylon, his homeland, after an absence of several years. Two other characters in this radio travelogue, Dick and Paul, are also John, since they represent respectively, John as a young boy, and John as the returned visitor who wants to settle down in his own country. ~~It is John who speaks first.~~

(Fade out drumming)

John: There was a day when you were in love  
And the canna heads came tumbling down;  
There was a day when the tempestuous heart  
Was a riot of colour in the drab town;  
And as they vanished, bright colours fading,  
Those trellised eyes faded and drowned.

Like rich cloths, and hair, fading,  
And ocean liner over the sky-line,  
Days, hands, lips vanished;  
There was nothing there that was mine;  
The canna grew again in the same bed,  
Dear flesh, beautiful as wine.

So fill the gardens with the tumble of canna,  
Ring the tinted heads by the gold coast,  
- Straight assegai of the passionate garden,  
Intricate growth of the heart's thirst;  
The fulfillment, and the resurrection  
Of the unlucky, and the lost.

All: Our names don't really matter!

John: Call me John!

Paul: And Paul!

Dick: And Dick!

John: (Fade in drumming)

The important thing to remember, is that (~~slight pause~~) <sup>three</sup> we ~~in~~ inhabit (~~slight pause~~) one head! There is the dilemma.  
Call us thoughts, if you will, that course in the fevered  
Brain of a poet. We are on a visit:

Dick: In Ceylon, the Pearl of the East.

Paul: We get on each other's nerves: the boy Dick  
Bubbling like soda water, with boyhood memories:  
The awkward child shot up by this island,  
Coined like a dewdrop on the crab-apple tree,  
- A magpie among the bright bric-a-brac of his youth;  
And I am the same boy, twenty years older,  
*Easy* ~~Busy~~ among the cinnamon lanes of this island,  
Conscious of her great past and future destiny.  
As for John, he is the difficult, unpredictable one:  
He is the mystic that broods sultrily,  
A smoky flame on a curled, question-mark wick,  
Fed by the inflammable mass of his <sup>wide and</sup> hungry experience.

But we three, the boy, John and I  
Are the same person, and that is what has made it difficult!

(Cut to sound of traffic and motor speeding down highway. Motor horn sounds. Fade and hold.)

*Paul* This mad rush round Ceylon!  
I will be glad to make my get-away,  
And settle down somewhere in peace.

*Dick:* ~~(enthusiastically)~~  
~~But we are on our way to the old College~~  
~~By Beira Lake, the jewel and toast of Colombo!~~

John: ~~Yes, Yes~~ . . . These excellent Colombo streets,  
Are more hot and dusty than I remember;  
And oh, these scruffy boutiques, crammed with toffee  
Spices and cigarettes: how small they seem now,  
These boutiques where often we had some tea.

Paul: ~~Compared with English cafes, they are no doubt drab,~~  
~~But then, did you visit them all?~~  
You forget the excellent tea and the short-eats;  
Ceylon is a good place to be in.

John: Tea with too much sugar!  
~~These gaping maws of boutiques~~ are more intimidating  
Than I remember. How is it, the villager,  
Well known for his tidy cottage and clean habits,  
In Colombo has spawned these rotting slums?

*Dick:* ~~Next turning driver for Beira Lake and the College!~~

*Driver:* ~~Okay, mahathaya.~~

Paul: In the East, life is hot and easy,  
Wrapped in his starry blanket, a man can lie.  
Torn away from Europe's mad hurdy-gurdy,  
Hot lips will taste leisure, and much of pleasure.  
See, John, Ceylon is picturesque;  
All the guide books paint it as paradise.  
The tourists, from Ibn Batuta, to A.P. Herbert,  
All came here, we are told, to feast their eyes!

John: Paradise is where one makes it, Paul,  
Through personal struggle - in the humming jungle,  
The pleasure resort, the hermitage or the village;



John: But it is a kind of selfishness,  
Unless geared to the world's noise,  
And the tractor's orbit, where the people toil.

Now tell me Paul, when you praise Ceylon,  
Is it from the view-point of the privileged,  
Or those who, year in year out, see the seasons  
Bring them no change? Do you  
Speak for yourself, or for all of us?

Paul: Let me tell you.

John: Ceylon's Beauty! A nebulous word!  
All the smart talk, and the beautiful talk  
On ~~of~~ [this lyrical and fertile place,  
Was done, remember, by people  
Who were ~~not~~ visitors to the island.  
All ~~the~~ islands of the world are magical,  
And have each received their just share of praise.  
Visitors and guests see with other eyes  
Than ours, from a smart hotel  
And the well-serviced bungalow.  
For the tourist, our privileged guest,  
The humdrum bazaar, and pustular slum  
Are no doubt picturesque! It's always so!

(Fade up of motor)

Our Paradise Island's not what it seems!  
It never was! It was an illusion!  
Whereas my visit should have made me happy,  
Reasonably so, at least, O what depression  
Has hung its octopus arms around my neck!  
I feel disillusioned! I must away  
I think, back to Europe!

(Cut to excited children's voices)

Dick: Paul, John, look at the boys,  
The spit images of what we were at school!

Paul: It's good to be back.

(Sound of car stopping; door being opened and shut)

Dick: ~~The Beira, The Beira Lake! Hurry! Look!~~

Paul: How calm and peaceful she shines like a dewdrop  
On grass, or a priceless pearl  
On Colombo's constructed bosom!

Dick: Yes. She caught us unawares  
When we were young: in love with everything:  
The bright ~~calamium~~ eyes by the water,  
The tortoises, and the kingfisher on wing,  
Mixed serenely with the old school's towers,  
The water sang in every eye and limb.

Paul: Spoke through the bamboo grove, now vanished,  
With several faces, that I once knew;  
The high clock rang across the lake,  
And a murmur of children's voices flew  
To lakeside grass, to play at pitch and toss;  
Revealed the animal, in each innocent eye.

John: Blind as the heart, you were, Beira water:  
Stone-deaf as the blooming rose;  
Time turning, toppled the roses down,  
Changed beautiful fires to cinder and ash;  
Hoar as heart's fire, the ill crowd now,  
Savaging my heart's ordinary wish.  
The balsa boats we roped on your ripples have gone:  
Bamboo-leaf, apple-green boats, the flowers  
We launched, flown, with their faces and wiles;  
Grave words have replaced youthful laughters,  
Disillusioned eyes dream by your thundering banks,  
Our youthful dreams festering, in your black waters!

(Cut to Casse-Noisette "Valse des Fleurs" and sound of speeding taxi.  
Hold music.)

Dick:        This is Horton Place, John, remember?  
Look at the trees!

John: Yes, yes, the Park Lane of Colombo  
Where all is racing or cricket;  
(The sum and total of Colombo life;  
-Together with the Sports Clubs, of course!)  
Each little race, Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim  
To his separate Club! There is also  
The amateur dramatics for an evening  
Now and then; nor must I forget  
The Hollywood films; and ~~the hotel dances!~~ *of course there's the hotel dance!*

Dick:        Mother will be waiting for us. But our cricketing  
*father* ~~Father~~ is, alas, no more!  
Horton Place, don't you think, is ~~truly~~ the most stately,  
The most beautiful thoroughfare in Ceylon?

John:        *(Ranjit)* Here where hands are jewelled, and the pace faster,  
High walls protect you from sudden disaster.

Paul: The evening face is becalmed on the Stud Book,  
And painted eyes fix you with a bold look.

Dick:        On the shaved lawn, the enamelled flower pots,  
Cheek-by-jowl with mother's noisy ducks,  
Spank through evening gloom the patch-work scene,  
And under the porches sits an amazing limousine!

Paul: Among the brass jardinieres, Mother's laughter tinkles,  
And the girls are pretty in their plastic wimples.  
Son's been wonderful this month at cricket,  
And father dreams of Duleep, Hobbs, and Ranjit.



John: Dreams of Kent, and hops, and an English morning,  
When the pitch was soft; his strokes a Worrell's adorning;  
When life was play, according to the book's rules,  
And young days sparkled, glowed like bright jewels.  
Horton Place, today, is gay with his laughter,  
He has gone with the flowers; but sunbirds with his love murmur:  
All has vanished that was once home to me;  
Is this my home, or virgin country?

(Sound of car up gravel drive and door being shut)

Mother: Good morning! We are late!

~~Al:~~ <sup>John:</sup> Good morning, Mother.

(Sounds of alighting from car - footsteps - and then boarding it. Doors are shut. Music continues)

Mother: We must hurry to the Colombo Oval!  
The Colombo Oval driver; it is eleven  
Thirty! Bandara had phoned to say  
The Commonwealth team have won the toss.  
We'll watch some cricket today!  
And we mustn't miss Frank Worrell!

And it's Independence Day tomorrow, remember,  
 Now ~~And~~ don't forget! At Galle Face Green  
 We'll watch the march past, and in the evening  
 We'll see the fireworks from the House of Representatives.

(Music is louder now. Cheering and clapping on cricket field. Cheers of "Well played, sir!" "Come on, Worrell!" etc. Fade out music. Hold cricketing sounds)

Mother: In this green bowl, the young  
Stars of cricket are gay in their flannel,  
With willow note of drive and play.  
~~XXXX~~ Square-cut, flick, heigh-ho - and Worrell  
On holiday, playing a merry bat,  
Lifting the ball into the wind's tunnel

For a six. (Cheers) Yes. That was a good one, sir;  
Your play today is fully excellent.  
To this excellent ground, where Ellora and Lotus  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX you have lent~~  
~~in each one of the five hundred pavilion vents.~~  
Capitals flourish like toadstools, you have lent  
Your fine willow-craft; placed a run  
In each one of the five hundred pavilion vents.

(Thunderous applause as Worrell reaches his second century. Shouts of "Well played, Worrell", "Well played, sir" etc.)

Two hundred! What a good show  
To delight the jaded palate!  
Flawless as the lace of distant Bombax Malabaricum  
O'er the Pavilion's horseshow: like a prelate  
Pontifical in the cool way you move,  
Dismiss, and pat, or select

The shy approach from a bold move!  
You've written well today in the book of Ceylon cricket

-Squadrons of black crows raid the Oval  
With the casuarian's green, and brown of wicket:  
Blend, mix with the palm's viridian,  
To paint a lively backcloth to your brand of cricket!

(Sounds of cheering and clapping are louder now)

Mother: Now don't forget tomorrow - the parade  
On Galle Face Green. You haven't seen yet  
Our Ceylon ship, the Vijaya, which I hear will be offshore.  
Her guns will mark the start of the celebrations  
-And don't forget, fireworks!

(Cut to H.M.C.S. Vijaya's guns firing a salute. Fade and hold /with music of brass band playing March)

Mother: Independence Day! What a sweet name!

Paul: In this morning's haze, sky and sea, uniform,  
The bobbing faces and silk umbrellas gay;  
The paper windmill seller, covered with wheels  
Of whirling colour, from head to foot, warns  
Sloe-eyed girls, and brats, it's a great day,  
And life's exactly what one feels.

Mother: Offshore, the Vijaya's hull, ash-grey,  
Look, now changing to a powder blue!  
From the sky's traffic stealing colour,  
For children's wonder, on this fine day!  
Humped chameleon, stuck in the ocean's glue,  
Nation's servant, the morning's jeweller.

Paul: Far off, the ships converge on trade routes,  
Their holds full of some Ceylon sun, perhaps,  
Their goal Cathay, or some small Pacific port,  
Floating down with timbers, resins, fruits,  
Jutes, teas, coriander; but by drum-taps  
We float today a different kind of boat:

(Sound of approaching aircraft)

Mother: A magic boat, if you will, for our children;  
From such modest launchings were Armadas quelled,  
Arrogant Troys taken, and Americas filled,  
And England Dunkirk-saved from the savage cauldron;  
It is our boat of freedom. clapped, belled  
To open sea, and to the future willed.

Paul: Freedom is also what one makes it;  
As I see these young cadets march by  
With their elder brothers, their faces brushed  
By the free air,

(Sound of aircraft right overhead)

their eyes lit  
With a new light, and as the Vampires fly  
In cohort with Brigands and Lancasters, I am impressed.

Dick: Commonwealth, Fraternity, Equality, will save us all!

John: These English faces are just, and old, and ours,  
Turned to the sun, will shine yet with the old wisdom.  
Today I saw a young child by Galle Face call  
To his Freedom locked in the old book's covers -  
Bless, O bless his birthright, and beautiful kingdom.



(Sound as of passing wind to denote passage of time. Voice of a large crowd and fireworks which punctuate the following)

Dick: Fireworks!

Mother: The broad pillars on either hand  
Of the House of Representatives, tall  
And solemn, frame the painted picture below:  
The turgid crowd beside the japanned  
And still sea, a gay and motley fall,  
Near us, relieved by a patch of Buddhist yellow.

Paul: The bright lights of ice-cream cars runnel  
The Beira's dark sable, still water.  
To our left, on tall pylons, see  
Two red lights, like a fairy's dumbell!  
On high, the fire-flowers, leaves, flutter,  
Delicate like these Burmese faces beside me.

John: With a snowfall brush the sapphire sky is painted  
In fire; with a shower of spheres, ovals, aces;  
Ferns, trees, palms, naves and steeples,  
And troll and fairy in the fire-house mated;

Mother: And below shine the sarees and children's faces,  
The gayest splash of colour, of all, my people!

(Fade out sound effects)

John: Independence Day! What can it mean  
When in Ceylon, I do not feel independent?  
The world's hungry itch for knowledge  
Has made me dependent. I am no longer  
My mother's boy, what I was;  
Each must to his task for discovery,  
Or failing, become a stuffed bird in the museum.

I must away, for the life of leisure,  
Tucked away in a tea-planter's nest,  
Or an office, putting my sloth to test:  
Riding in cars, talkative in clubs, believing  
I am important, and useful, can surely rot me!  
I will be dead, yet proud of my stone face.  
Ceylon is awake now, it is true:  
She is a fair, where all the lights are on,  
The engines humming, and the keeps of booths,  
Each shouting, believing his offer good;  
But I must be spared the panting merry-go-round,  
I have been on it before, and several more.  
It is the same story, repeated ad nauseam  
In a different place; and how can it concern me  
Who am the inheritor of the world's noise,  
Except I was born here, which was an accident?  
Anyway, who can tell me my duty,  
To my country, to myself?  
How may one serve one's country best,  
Buried in her, or fruiting in foreign soil?  
I must find out.

(Cut to sound of fireworks. Fade and hold)

Paul: John, you must listen to that clamour,  
It is your country awakening. You have a place  
In it, which you must now fill with grace.

John: Gracefulness is often the mug's face,  
The charlatan's evening dress, the idler's stand-by;  
And tell me what is country, but in the mind,  
The nett result of those things one holds precious?  
The world has contracted, I think, to a billiard ball,  
And one's roots are in England, Africa or elsewhere,  
You cannot change yourself!

Paul: A man can only be happy in his  
Own country. It is his duty, besides,  
To shoulder his burdens - be a responsible man!  
Home is always, where you were born!

(Cut to Naga-sinnam music and sound of express train. Fade out)

Paul: I am tired of all this dashing around:  
But in this palmyrah country  
- This extreme north of Ceylon, where silver islands  
With gold shores, and musical Dutch names,  
Are singing harps in these slap-happy breezes -  
-Salt-laden, mango-filled, aromatic-  
-I do feel happy - in Jaffna - ~~the land of my fathers~~; *Althorpe*  
Strange, but nothing has changed, as in Colombo!

*then Paul*  
Dick: ~~Jaffna~~ has always been like this, I was told.  
She is medieval: These Walauwas or estates  
Have been the same for hundreds of years!

Paul: Here by toddy roots, the Golden Oriole  
Prints yellow tracks across the zig-zag fences.  
Heart slumbers in the heat, with the lorikeet,  
And mind's bereft of all extravagant fancies;  
Her velvet eye in the ancient Walauwa  
Fondles a paper rose with her soft glances.

*omit* John: Home, mome, where is it you started?  
Did you grow with the coral under Kayts,  
Streak with ~~white~~ wild horses on Delft isle,  
Flower in the crystal, passionless nights?  
Lone by strange Fort Hammenhiel  
Unravel the world's wrongs and rights?

Paul: From Northermost point Pedro, the spanking  
North-Easter encircles Jaffna's tulips  
-Dusty tulip-trees of the maidan,  
To many, their childhood toy and dulep!  
Remember the fruit that were the play tops  
Underneath the old school-house's burlap?

John: Flat as a table-top, the landscape;  
Gothic cathedrals of palmyrahs, doves;  
Salt eatuaries with heron and flamingo  
And pensive stork, that memory adores:  
All this Jaffna, and more, you are to those,  
Sprung in your red earth, and bird-filled groves.

CUT

CUT



Dick:

John, we must visit the nearby villages,  
- Atchuvvely, where grandfather, the poet, lived.  
And where the Catholic Fr. Thomas, and the Rosarians  
- The new order of monks that he founded -  
Have enchanted the very place I hear,  
- With grapes and tobacco, husbandry and greenery;  
I have not seen this, it being recent;  
And then we must on to Manipay,  
Where we all come from. These places  
Are truly home to me.

(Cut to Naga-sinnam music and fade out)

1st. Peasant: Aiyoy! Aiyoy! The Master is here.

2nd. Peasant: Heaven be blessed! A million praises! The light of all our eyes is here again.

John: Atchuvvely has not changed it seems, except that  
Grandfather has died. His theatre, his  
Plays are among the things we shall miss.

(Hubbub of peasants' voices)

1st. Peas: Aiyyah, aiyyah, you have come surely  
To fill your grandfather's place. Since he  
Died ours has been a different lot; *different*  
~~There was no one else, who loved us, as much.~~

John: I see a lot of new buildings. The new school  
Is marvellous. Boyhood memories  
Makes Atchuvvely a long thought-of  
And heavenly place!

(Fade in bird cries)

Paul: When I was young, the flame-trees and the jasmine  
Gilded my youthful eyes with tenderness  
For natural things - the lotus pond and the palmyrah:  
The ring dove tore the air with natural passion;  
Here at Atchuvvely, my boyhood home, all else  
Seemed unimportant beside a bassia star.

Dick: The carrion eagle atop the rambling lanes  
Wheeled in the pastel sky, and a big owl  
Dozed in a tree beside the tethered cow

(Fade in farmyard sounds)

The goat coughed among the pecking hens  
Of which I owned two, three; and morning's haul  
Of eggs belonged to me, they said, for supper.

I had a goat too, a cow, and Lakshmi,  
Gentle, big-eyed mongrel of a dog;  
And when she died I did not feel like supper -  
And there was "Aachi" wrinkled kind old "Aachi"  
At six, she told us stories about a frog  
In a well: food slipped down like sweetened milk and guava.

(Bird sounds punctuate the following)

Around our house the mango shoots were pink,  
The big bassia dropped its blossom like snow;  
The pomegranate spun its exciting wheel  
Against the dropcloth of palmyrah mink;

Between the cleander's and trumpet lily's show  
Pencil of arecanut, was wire of steel.

Dick:

*arecanut*  
I was four or five, and grandfather, the poet,  
In turban of gold and coat of black was a prince  
Who was kind to us; he flicked the coiled whip,  
And off we went down limestone white roads  
Fringed with lantana eyes; from prints  
He cut us paper dolls, with a clever snip.

(Cut to Ceylon operatic song as background to following)

Paul:

Remember evenings in the theatre, his plays  
Like Kalidasa's full of dance and song:  
My father once taking the leading role  
(Great-uncle Thambar dancing with a painted face  
Agile as Nijinsky); his poems a gong  
Stung me to listen to the metrics whirl.

(Cut to background of peasant reading chorus)

Paul:

All this was home, and we were self-contained, *home.*  
Our friends provided grain, tobacco, shallots,  
Garlic, pepper, bay-leaves, ginger, saffron,  
Yams, greens, fruits, famed  
For delicacy and flavour. The seas filled with pots  
And nets, rang in the whole seas kingdom,

(Fade out chorus)

This was long ago; and there was home  
Beside the Eastern harbour full of ships,  
And pretty shells on the deserted lunar beach:  
Goat's foot underfoot, and a lyric poem  
In the screwpine smell. The harbour lips  
Enclosed a town beyond the railroads reach.

(Background of jungle sounds)

There was peace in Trincomalee jungles too:  
With leopard, deer and buffalo, I roamed  
The jungle paths with Austin, and my brothers;  
And beyond were the dead cities, the clue  
To ancient hubbub, now becalmed,  
- All the mighty dead Anuradhapuras.

(Cut to hubbub of stock exchange voices. Fade out)

John:

Colombo. Ah, Colombo, Excrescence of Trade,  
Competition, Endeavour - the pattern did not hold;  
Chaos of many patterns, amorphous,  
- The island's harlot, and Empires accolade.  
In those days; still you were home, a mould  
That shaped me in the Western swirl and rush.

Paul:

Colombo was home indeed. The silver lights  
Etched the night's dark with fauns and delicate shapes,  
The streets magical by the half-light;  
And when the moon dispelled the grey nights,  
Silver palms stood by elfin capes,  
Proud and feminine in their lissom flight.



John:

All this we loved, my friends, Noel, Rowan,  
Tissa ( a young school of friends);  
All this was heaven, until we grew,  
And learnt the dog bit, the moon was ruin,  
The gilt wore off, and all that magic lends  
Is a false perspective, with the chocolate-box view.

And there was Nurwara Eliya, the new-found escape  
With a trout-stream in the well-kept park;  
Upcot, Haputale, Maskeliya knew few rivals;  
But, alas, the concrete base and rubber crepe <sup>far</sup>  
Brought my village, this village to mind, ~~far~~ from/dark;  
Self-contained, she knew no rival.

So after Independence Day, with bells and bunting,  
I am wondering whether the hectic pace  
Will give the peace and plenty that we seek;  
Whether the brash plane and limousine affronting  
Shiva in the wooden cart, can grace,  
Or start a new tear, on the ancient cheek.

Whether it's better to adorn the top or bottom,  
To increase the village round, and soul's girth,  
Or roundly add to the world's hue and cry  
- The bazaar's cheating, and the traffic's hum;  
(Slight pause)

But this is my island, this my native earth  
That bore me gently from a woman's sigh:  
(More deliberately and slowly)

Her eye a blackbird among the tumbling bushes,  
Her lashes, the black silk of a deep night;  
Her body, the pure long scarf of Laxapana,  
Lights of an ocean liner in her tresses,  
Black tresses, filled with dark and light;  
Cry, O Cry, Namo, Namu, Matha - "Glory to thy Name, O Mother"

~~(Out to Naga-sinnam music, and fade out)~~

Paul:

In you, John, the world has written its story,  
The contradictions of the present time;  
Would you, O myself, save the feudal past,  
An unthinking and sentimental juror?  
In grandfather's days, were the ticks sublime?  
- People bleeding with stigmata of caste?

Your view of Atchuvely is romantic;  
Progress changing this and that, has brought  
An unfamiliar view, as you admit.  
While the past, magical and gigantic,  
Holds you in thrall, my dear, you distort  
The present, and your goal out-wit!

What is it you hanker for, John?  
Grandfather's days, when all was leisure,  
And rice five cents a ~~pound~~ pound?  
Grandfather was the upshot of his time,  
He had his points and also his pleasure:  
But how prove you, my dear, his times were sound?

(Fade in voice singing Ainthu Kallal Oru Kottai as background to following)

John:

I remember . . . . . <sup>head</sup>  
 Here his silver ~~head~~ dreamed of the hoopoe  
 In a perfect sonnet for his darling's praise;  
 In his wife's arms, thrust the jujube and mango,  
 The shire's plenty, and ancestral grace;  
 Plucked her the magic islands of the West,  
 Kayts, Hammenhall, all those places  
 Long disappeared now in the seas' depths,  
 Where starfish with the turtle races.  
 Clattered the passionate stars over Atchuvely,  
 His heart beat faster in each song:  
 The thrush entered his heart with the shimmering neem tree;  
 And now he's gone, the trolls their vigils keep,  
 His days beat down, glittering and strong,  
 And in the bassia grove the orioles ~~weep~~ <sup>thint</sup>.

(Cut out music)

Paul:

Tell me, ~~tell me~~ what you mean, John,  
 Why this remembrance of things past,  
 This hankering for another time?  
 Are not Independence and Progress one?  
 All this progress we see here will last  
 You'll see, and higher yet we'll climb!

It's true grandfather's time had more leisure;  
 Four-square in his village, on a firm base  
 (The one of his father's) he was happy and effective  
 In his own way. (Mysteriously) But nowadays, Ceylon,  
 And Truth have a different face!  
 It's up to you to face it!

John:

So this is home! Revolving time has brought  
 The sun to his oven, and the traveller home;  
 Bright eyes, I looked at by the garden gate  
 Are gone, with hair's brilliance, and kind words;  
 The simple look framed in the eyes' ovals,  
 Lost with the bright moments and gay birds.

Paul:

In youth we picked the Beira at Colombo  
 For tranquillity; and green bamboo grove;  
 By Galle Face, we took the breeze's kisses,  
 For her innocent kisses, and were much in love;  
 Played in her hair school of silver fishes,  
 And in her breast slept the turtle dove.

(Fade in Valse des Fleurs as background to the following)

Dick:

She was all desire, from the Galle Face beaches,  
 To white spray on the harbour mole;  
 And when lights powdered the masts' tresses,  
 Flowers grew in the water, and fiery salamanders;  
 When the sun began to roll  
 On the lighthouse top, we discovered places.

In the Park, the iron fountain wept,  
 Softly, among duckweed and tall rushes;  
 We were children, and I remember Mary,  
 Who whispered to me, "I am from England;"  
 On Sundays, we danced to the band's ta-ra-ray,  
 Trailing our loops and ribbons round the band-stand.



Paul:

This was long ago, when the mud-stained boys  
Cranking bicycles, were shot through narrow gates;  
Steaming motors deposited some,  
And Suppi, in his carriage, bound in brass  
Was a sedate and inky pirate,  
Singing "Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum."

And yet our city grew with us, crammed  
With her antique gentleness and quiet days.

(Cut to Tchaikovsky Symp. No.6 3rd.Movement as background to foll.)

John:

But with the urgent use of quartz and macadam,  
Her gentle and impulsive heart was killed:  
Became the whorl of the bazaar's maze,  
Joined forever, to hardware, the rupees and the tin.

*stunt!*  
Wicked city lights ringing the breakfast table,  
The ~~silent~~ light reveals love turned to stone;  
The blood of the zinnias in the glass bowl,  
Bathes the stark masonry of our Babel;  
The headless torso at the ~~table~~ table sits alone,  
And through anxious windows, the stone dogs howl.

(More agitatedly) The rubber bats have settled in the old  
Of the hardware baron; black as tea leaves house  
His tangy smile, which has released the civilizing  
Commodore on unsuspecting villagers, and the nobbled house  
That in luck, with the unlucky grieves,  
For lost innocence, and the fever rising.

T

And even a thief shall be honoured in this house,  
Filled with paper roses under neon lighting;  
The telephone rings, and the magistrate speaks  
To pronounce the dead living, and the living dead.  
Maggots have fouled the lorikeet's flighting,  
And guavas rot beside the high walls.

*seems*  
The ~~seems~~ of Port Said have invaded this house,  
The dinner gong rings, and the undertaker enters  
In his severe clothes, adds the day's takings,  
- The innocent dead, the time ~~mows~~ mows;  
Sits down to dinner with the dissenters.  
Who have joined him tonight, who are with him now.

And so, there's terror today in the old house;  
Steel flowers shine in Colombo harbour;  
World's dither has come through the wires,  
And her frail side, Time's explosion blows;  
Breached is the peaceful mind, and antique armour,  
The old terrors howl in new fires.

It's ancient the theme; competition, strife;  
Remember it in my friend Basil Wright's  
"Song of Ceylon"? The tranquil Buddha  
Worshipped in green glades, and then knife  
That suddenly descended; the noise, the murderous light  
Of the bazaar's squabble and thunder.

And city humming on its concrete axis.

(Fade out music.)

Paul: The grape-vine's cord and yam's arrows  
Pinpoint the holiness of your steeple;  
The Rosarian monks, whose prayer is silence and toil  
And devotion, have taught our people well.

John: Did the parched earth yield this red wine,  
And the leathery pomegrante, this fine brandy?

Dick: In what wild berry, this soap's shine  
And lather, did you discover?  
This land was always dry.

John: But in it you have dug the deepest well!

Paul: Burgeon it will, for ever, and for all!

(Cut to Naga-sinmam and sound of speeding car. Voice: "Next turning for Manipay.") CUT

John: To many Manipay is but a name  
Where their ancestors tilled and brought forth;  
Where old houses with broad verandahs  
Multiplied the families of great worth;  
Where they studied Maniyampathiyar Santhathi Murai  
To praise the antecedents of each birth.

*omit*  
Cultivated, conservative, progressive,  
Beyond their time and condition;  
The scholar GnanaPrakaser, the Mathers,  
The greatness of Coomaraswamy at Boston,  
Ramanathan, Arunachalam, the statesmen;  
Emigrants to Malaya, France and London.

Something precious was born in Manipay,  
Behind the stone walls and thatch fences;  
Bold as sparrows, bright-eyed as robins,  
Whole and undivided their fancies;  
They found order under the Mind's  
Precise and glittering lenses.

So let us praise antique Manipay,  
The spring of so much good endeavour;  
Where the peacock flower was all flame and golden,  
And there were peacocks once in that shady bower;  
Where silk rustled, and be-jewelled hands  
Blessed you, and stole you forever. CUT

(Cut to sound of express train. Sound of porters shouting "Anuradhapura, Anuradhapura; Change for Trincomalee.")

Guide: (With a Ceylon accent) Let me show you Anuradhapura, sir.  
This city, now in ruins, was once  
As large as London, two thousand years ago:  
They had nine storey buildings then!  
It is now the home of Buddhism;  
And it is here, we have the sacred Bo-Tree,  
The oldest authenticated tree in the world:  
It was the gift of the Indian Emperor Ashoka,  
To Ceylon, the eternally beautiful island.

(Fade in Mazart string quartet, slow movement and hold)



John:

Stone, on stone,  
Jungle on brick,  
Fall the ages,  
Fast and thick,  
Gamini on Elara,  
Honourable foemen:  
Silk tresses on silk  
Like Mozart,

Their ancient music  
Is faded now:  
The people have vanished,  
And all is quiet,

Quiet as death,  
Desperate foes  
Have found peace:  
Pillars and shadows,

But now are woken  
By new suns,  
And different voices  
Claiming their allegiance.

Dick:

What more history is there to write?  
Can we read the old stones aright?  
- These worm letters  
Crowding like thick leaves  
On granite pillars?

Fern-combs, grass-blades, tendrils  
Forever petrified;  
A message on the warm stones' side  
From those that died!

By these stone balustrades, and moonstones,  
It seems their legends  
Burst into priests, princes, merchants  
And brigands!

Anuradhapura, Kotte, Polonnaruwa,  
On the wind's side  
Disappeared: peaceful in these cut stones  
Abide!  
What more history is there to write?

John:

When there is no more to write it is best to sleep,  
There is no rest, no handshakes, weep, weep,  
As the tired breezes round the lattice creep  
And the pool wears out the stone, and nerves break;  
A heart has a history like this stone place,  
Dreaming Anuradhapura, give us your great peace;  
Speak, speak of the warm light in each face  
That blessed you, my city, my beautiful one.  
My flowers of stone, dear city, when you alone  
Gave to the child this stupa, this pillar, this Buddha.  
Sleep, sleep, with your broken eye, and have long rest,  
And hold the frail birds fast in your green nest.

(Fade out music)

Dick:

*min*

(Background of light music)

And now by the closely cropped and shaved golf-links  
With a wooden bridge, that thrusts across the stream  
Like a root; the dark green cypresses  
With their needle leaves, and aromatic cone,  
With the suave park and fish-filled lake  
Make a geometric and crystal landscape.

(Cut to racehorses galloping on course)

Dick

Black on red, and tan on gold, the sarees  
Sport like spring tints on the race course;  
Sita looks pretty and petite,  
And Rohini's eyes shine in the swirling light,  
While Aru is totting up his bets  
And jovial clubmen have morning heads.  
The holiday city dreams among the hills;  
The day blows cool in the fuschia bells. ]

(Cut to sound of express train. Cut to rollers breaking on shore, fade and hold.)

John:

*min*

A bit further down, it's Land's End:  
Here on the toasting, curving beach of Galle  
Looping whitely, and serenely southwards,  
Many a trader and marauder, like a gull  
Settled for a while, on this rocky escarpment,  
Grubbing for spices, ivory and jewels.

The humbler traffic of the beach, the rock-crabs  
Like spiders, starfish, and the stranded jelly:  
Shells like bassia flowers and melon seeds,  
And stronger tints on the conch's belly,  
Flaunt as bright a bazaar for the bathers;  
The tepid sea's an acid green like nelli.

The viridian palms frame castellated Closenburg  
- The sea salt dream of a Dutch sea captain.  
The ding-dong breeze tears through enormous windows  
To a timbered hall lined with coral and gypsum;  
Shher drop of rockface to the white-lace water  
Is a rug, squat Closenburg is wrapped in.

Dick:

(Cut to sound of wind and waves and hold)

This sleepy old town of Galle is picturesque:  
It was the ancient sea-port for Solomon's ships;  
But all we see now are the Dutchmen's houses,  
Who made merry here, for a while, with their women-and  
whips!

Paul:

They died and left behind these buildings,  
Plucked from the streets of Den Haag, Leyden, Delft;  
Governors, evangelists, and merchants,  
Those the cinnamon and brocaded years had blessed.

John:

Full of crinolines, carriages and brick ovens,  
And rough soldiery floating on pot-still arrack,  
Solid as whole-meal bread, these old houses,  
Once guarded the bored, the romantic, the bright.

Paul:

And now part of our heritage - the granite and limestone,  
Or baked brick - remind the mere talkers  
Of their enormous industry and work, well done.



John:

So honour these bright builders, whose blood  
Still flows merry and quick, where least known,  
And where the sea-spray, on the sea-pink's blown;  
But most of all in this picturesque, old, seaside town

(Cut to sounds of station platform. Voice from loudspeaker "Kandy, Kandy,  
Alight for Kandy, please." Long excerpt from Kandyan dance record. Fade  
and hold.)

Paul:

Tham, thikka, tham, tha,  
- A mnemonic, I seem to remember,  
When Ukkuwa, light-hearted leaper  
Was fine foil for Saramba;  
And the very dust danced  
In the white heat.  
To the hot taps  
Of Saramba's quick beat;  
And the hill's drum answered,  
Beat for heart's beat,  
And echo, minted in a pre-Christain court,  
Flung a chanking, ankleted note,  
Into the day's throat.

And I remember <sup>Arana</sup> ~~Arana~~, the boisterous,  
Repeat Saramba's patterns in another clime,  
And how the grass-blades and hills of Kandy  
Came alive in London;  
And how a Ceylon girl and I clapped,  
Clapped, carried away by something I can't express,  
That was then born.

(Cut out the Kandyan music)

Paul:

(Softly) It's peaceful here, by the constructed lake,  
Buildings sit on the water, and ripples break  
On an ornamental wall, pierced with triangles,  
Which declare it Kandyan; Jingles  
Of fussy trees, make a bright border,  
And the stentorian cabbage-palm routs the disorder;  
Cassia's candelabra hang yellow, and the rain tree  
Thrusts its coral whiskers at the powder-blue sky.  
The Garden at the southern end is a Persian carpet,  
Rare as a cobra's diamond, and famous as a song-hit.  
I envy these nut-brown children tumbling down the red  
Their school must be near heaven. on the sloping hill  
Slender as the lake's reeds, and tense like the sun's /  
This is the elfin kingdom, they inherit. heat  
They say sloe-eyed princesses, once dreamed on that is  
And also a mother drowned there, quite out of mind;  
Dark and light, the waters, their ancient secrets keep  
Surface moves and ripples on the edge of sleep.

(Cut to elephant's trumpeting and elephant kraal drumming. Fade and hold)

John:

In this valley, so things happened!  
The elephant was noosed by the unkind  
Hand of a king, before the palace gates,  
With drumming and shouting, as Robert Knox relates.  
Maligawa, temple to Gautama Buddha  
The Enlightened One, is jewel of this place;  
Sparkles like a cut stone, in the even light,  
Its facets reflecting the half-light.

There are those Englishmen, for instance,  
Who after disenchantment, chasing destiny,  
Found their peace in that Buddhist  
Hermitage near Galle; but to me,  
Their answer seems too easy!

Paul:       Theirs was indeed a difficult choice;  
To make such a decision needs conviction . . .  
. . . Tell me, isn't it for lack  
Of such a strong belief, you suffer?

John:       There is a belief in the right thing, or the wrong thing,  
And to one who thinks there is something lacking  
In modern life, as I do,  
All decisions are doubly hard.  
Blessed is that painter at Kandy  
And those two monks at Galle,  
Who have conviction in the thing they do,  
- Observing the rain-clouds, and the monsoon pass,  
Watching the cocoa-pod ripen on the russet branch;  
But this is my own country; the Gauguin act  
Will not be (with humour) as satisfactory in my  
Own case! I am the village  
Into which they quietly disappear.  
I am the exotic accompaniment to which  
They relax, and shelve their problems;  
And it is so easy when you don't belong here!  
I am the landscape!

Paul:       Is it the landscape, our yourself, that is at fault?

(Tchaikovsky 6th. Symphony, 3rd. Movement, fade and hold)

John:       A landscape is not itself alone, but people  
Who have lived in it, and shaped it, carved it out;  
Tourists have declared, for instance,  
Kashmir is heaven; but I noticed  
A groaning land where the filth and lice  
Corroded the valley, making a hooded nightmare  
That haunted me. I have learnt  
Guide-books don't state the truth,  
Or are written from a selfish point of view,  
That gilds ugliness and suffering, with a flase glamour,  
Or ignores it, while exploiting a personal angle.  
Gauguin, shall we say, was an exotic  
In Tahiti, as Clive in India?  
They were not the ~~at~~ landscape, that remained  
Voiceless in their time. But now  
All earth is pierced with voices -  
Is articulate - you shall hear her speak!  
The fault lies in Time alone, I think;  
Not yet, not yet, for me my own country!  
-Here is mother!

(Cut out music)

Mother:     John, it's time you got some sense;  
Independent Ceylon, has possibilities  
For an ambitious young man. Business  
Is prospering; and if you stood, my dear,  
For Parliament, you have a chance:  
If only you had some sense!



Is also Africa, and England, China and Elsewhere:  
It all depends, where one works best!

(Fade in Tschaikovsky Symphony No.6, 3rd. Movement as background)

Paul: Duty to one's country first, I should think!  
The expatriate is always pathetic.

John: Pathetic, yes, since he must pluck at courage  
To chase the swallow of his dreams:  
To forego the enchanting and lyrical island,  
The quiet hermitage, the refuge from toil,  
Is indeed not easy. I will serve my country  
But in my own time, and way: not squabbling  
In the marketplace, and lining my nest  
In Patriotism's name, and that of Progress.  
(With humour) And even that's better done in other place  
The world has contracted to a billiard ball:  
One can play soldier, anywhere one pleases.

Mother: Charity  
Starts at home, John. Are you not proud  
Of this ancient land, with its  
Two thousand five hundred years of known history?

John: I suspect all this "Ancient Glory" stuff!  
We are but a new nation, on the threshold  
Of nationhood. We must learn yet  
What it is that makes a nation important.  
Our splendid past has little to do with  
The present, as in England, Italy or India.  
Our progenitors, through the exercise of wisdom,  
And splendid energy, built a Great Day,  
For themselves, and their time;  
But these things pass, unless re-vitalised  
By constant watchfulness and effort,  
We are a new nation,  
And our greatness will be judged, in the present,  
By our own efforts, the things we erect;  
We have not yet, I think, a tradition;  
I must away, away to the work that I must  
Do. And home is where one's work  
And interests lie. That is elsewhere for the present  
I think.

Mother: The best work is always done  
In one's own country, from a core of belief,  
And traditions that are one's own!  
How can you guarantee the worth  
Of any work that you do?

John: In an inter-dependent world, a spark  
In London, sets fire to Ceylon or Korea;  
We are no longer alone, the world is  
Too much with us: and mind has frontiers  
Only the limitations of ignorance!  
As for a Ceylon tradition, the present  
Is but an extension of Europe's  
- A magic bridge between the West and East:  
Which is our tradition, that is the way I see it!

(Slow Movement, Mozart String Quartet as background to following)

John: I am my own country! What am I,  
But the outcome of forces let loose on me?  
Although you may revolt against the idea,  
We are the 'children of the West and East.  
We are ourselves. We are the nett result  
Of our education, our times, our customs:  
And we are fortunate, I think, in this new role  
Of a precious bridge from the West, to the East.  
I must away, for I have work to do!

Mother: Alas, alas, what will become of you?

Dick: Think, you must think, John: don't be hasty!

**Paul:** You are mad! This is madness indeed!  
What can you find in worn-out ageing Europe?

Hohn: Sorry, mother, that is my decision,  
And I must go.

Paul:           A dark destiny. O terrible destiny  
                  That you abandon your own country!

John: Perhaps the better to serve her!

Dick: And you won't serve me. You will leave me behind  
Your pining and accusing self!

Mother: Will you leave us all in the dark?

Paul:                   And you will have denied me . . .

(Background of nostalgic Ceylon music)

(~~to be destroyed~~) . . You will miss pure breath of mountain  
& white streets

Cascading down the ravines, mountain flowers:  
Garlands of the eternal island, garlands of light  
Weaving a chaplet for the crystal and bright morning:  
Anklets of silver among the jade bushes,  
Nose-rings, ear-rings, bangles and brown baskets  
For the tea-tips; and aromatic dreams  
Of islands. Goodbye John! We are lost! Lost!

(Fade out music)

John: Goodbye Paul and Dick. Goodbye Mother!  
I do not know whether I do wrong or right.  
My mind is torn like the sea  
We float on. I feel humbled  
And full of doubts. But time has only this  
To offer us, and we are her mirror!

(Voice singing Aithu Kallai Oru Kottai is background to following)



Korteboam-on-the-Hill was a childhood symbol  
Of deep sea ships and men, the flying fish:  
Tonight her strung lights remind the voyagers  
Of home, the eyes that were brown and simple;  
The drumming ships float in the harbour dish;  
A thousand fingers comb the palms' tresses.

(LONG DRAWN OUT SHIP'S SIREN SOUNDS)

End